

Smoke-Free Policy Protects Health of S.C Coastal Area Residents

Issue

Tobacco use is the leading preventable cause of death and illness in South Carolina. Currently, 22.5 percent of S.C. adults smoke cigarettes, according to the 2005 Behavior Risk Factor Surveillance Survey. Among teens, 24.4 percent of S.C public high school students smoke, according to the 2005 Youth Tobacco Survey. "Secondhand smoke is a significant health concern," said Matt Petrofes, director of the S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control's Region 8, which serves Beaufort, Colleton, Hampton and Jasper counties. "Reducing exposure to secondhand smoke is the responsible thing to do for the benefit of the public's health."

There is no safe level of exposure to secondhand smoke, according to the June 2006 U.S. Surgeon General's report, *The Health Consequences of Involuntary Exposure to Tobacco Smoke*.

Intervention

To reduce exposure to secondhand smoke and protect the public from harmful health consequences, SC DHEC Region 8 Public Health has developed and implemented a smoke-free policy for all of its campuses, facilities and vehicles. Without the availability of PHHS Block Grant funds to cover salary costs, this project would not have been possible. Thanks to PHHS Block Grant funds, staff time and resources could be devoted to this project. Implemented January 1, 2006, the policy:

- Prohibits the use of tobacco products by employees, customers, visitors, and contractors while in any building, facility or vehicle that is part of the public health region;
- Displays appropriate signage in all areas (facilities, grounds, vehicles) in English and Spanish;
- Provides leadership in assuring that employees, customers, visitors, and contractors adhere to the policy; and
- Provides assistance via information and referral to smoking cessation programs.

Impact

- Hundreds of clients served at each health department site are further protected from secondhand smoke while entering and exiting buildings; and
- SC DHEC as the leading health authority in the state now sets an example for smoke free policy at worksites, hopefully impacting other organizations, businesses and communities to do the same.
- Region 8 exercises opportunities to educate the public through news releases, newspaper articles, and other venues regarding the harmful effects of tobacco. A press release was issued concerning his policy on December 15, 2005.

Contact

Barbara H. Laurie, MSW, LMSW,
South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control,
1407 King Street, Beaufort, South Carolina 29902
843-525-4084 (f) 843-521-5507, lauriebh@dhec.sc.gov